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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000717

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: TFG AND AMISOM VIEWS OF SECURITY ISSUES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Minister of Defense Mohammed Abdi "Gandhi" told the Ambassador on March 23 that his government was "out-gunned" by the insurgents and said that the UN arms embargo on the TFG should be lifted. He said his government was not engaged in any official discussions with members of the anti-TFG forces, but said unofficial contacts were occurring between the insurgents and businessmen, civil society members, and clan leaders to convince the insurgents to stop their attacks. Gandhi said he did not understand U.S. vetting requirements for support to TFG security forces, and he requested additional information on the subject. In a separate meeting on March 24, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Force Commander Major General Francis Okello told the Ambassador that the Somalis themselves must take ownership of the political process or it would not succeed. Okello said that the Joint Security Force (JSF) had yet to be established because the Joint Security Committee (JSC) had made little progress and was taking too long to do its work. He thought that AMISOM's current mandate was sufficient, but he made a plea for better armored vehicles, secure communications, and real-time warning of threats against his forces. Both Gandhi and Okello were in Addis Ababa for the March 23 Consultative Meeting of the African Union, Troop Contributing Countries, and International Partners. End Summary.

Gandhi: The TFG is Outgunned, Lift the Arms Embargo

¶2. (C) TFG Minister of Defense Mohammed Abdi Gandhi told the Ambassador on March 23 that the insurgents were better armed, and that the UN arms embargo was restricting the TFG's ability to fight. He said the TFG had requested a waiver on the embargo from the UN through the African Union, but that he did not know what action, if any, had been taken to respond to their request. Gandhi also told the Ambassador that TFG President Sheikh Sharif had decided to allocate any money the government received, whether from the international community or from internally generated revenue, for payment to the TFG's security forces. For the near term, he said, Sharif had taken a one million USD loan from Somali businessmen to pay troop salaries for one month. He also said Sharif had just visited Sudan and Libya to request funds to pay the security forces.

Gandhi: No Official TFG Dialogue with Insurgents

¶3. (C) Gandhi said the TFG was not currently engaged in any official dialogue with the insurgents or with Hassan Dahir

Aweys or Muktar Robow. However, he said, unofficial discussions were going on between Somali businessmen and the insurgents, as well as between clan elders, civil society members, and the insurgents. The various parties were attempting to convince the insurgents to "choose dialogue" over violence, but he reiterated that there were no "official" discussions underway.

Gandhi: Vetting for the JSF an Issue

¶4. (C) Gandhi observed that the international community had many questions but offered little direct assistance, particularly for the TFG security forces, and he hoped he would see the much needed assistance "before he died." In response, Embassy officers explained U.S. vetting requirements for security assistance, and encouraged Gandhi to provide the required information in order to facilitate U.S. support. Gandhi said he did not understand U.S. vetting requirements and he suggested that in the near future he might meet with U.S. officials at length to understand exactly what information the TFG needed to provide, and what he should expect from the U.S. government. The Ambassador offered that U.S. officials were available to meet with Gandhi at any time.

Okello: Somalis Must Take Ownership of Process

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting on March 24, AMISOM Force Commander Major General Francis Okello told the Ambassador

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that in his view, the international community was doing its part to help the TFG, but said it was "up to the Somalis" to take the initiative and make the process work. He said the problems originate within the TFG itself, and only the Somalis can resolve those issues. Okello was particularly worried about recent public statements by members of the TFG and others who had come out opposed to any increase in the number of AMISOM troops. He said the situation was "worrying" and that while it had not yet boiled over, the temperature in Mogadishu was rising. He opined that elements within the TFG were trying to pull the government apart for their own reasons. (Note: The TFG Foreign Minister's March 20 request to the UNSC for additional AMISOM troops prompted an outcry against AMISOM by various individuals and groups within Somalia, some of whom are members of the TFG. TFG President Sheikh Sharif, however, continues to publicly support AMISOM. End Note.)

Okello on the Way Forward

¶6. (C) The priority should be on supporting the TFG security forces, Okello insisted. He thought it was too early to tell whether Sharif would survive, but he observed that in Somalia one needed "muscle" to push one's views. Therefore, the international community should support the TFG first, AMISOM second, he said. He assessed that neither the international community nor AMISOM could install a government in Somalia, and neither could they go into the countryside and fight the insurgents. He said the focus of the international community should be on the stability of the TFG, not on timelines for a possible UN mission that will not be able to defeat al-Shabaab.

Okello: TFG Joint Security Force Not Yet Stood Up

¶7. (C) General Okello said the TFG Joint Security Force was not yet established and was waiting for the Joint Security Committee to begin its work. He complained that the JSC was taking far too long to get the process moving. The command and control system and the organizational structure for the JSF did not yet exist, Okello said, noting that "there was

yet no framework from within which integration (of TFG and ARS forces) can occur." He also commented that the ARS militia commanders were refusing to integrate their forces because they considered TFG forces too "diluted," and not proper Muslims. He said that when integration did begin, he expected the process to take several months at least.

¶18. (C) Okello noted that both the TFG and ARS had submitted lists of names of soldiers to AMISOM to be placed into the JSF when it is established. He said AMISOM was now in the process of going over the lists of names "one by one" to verify each individual's information and then issue them an ID card. Okello said AMISOM had issued approximately 800 ID cards to date. Okello added that the TFG was paying 3,300 former TFG troops and 3,100 former ARS troops from which the soldiers for the 2,700 man JSF would be taken.

¶19. (C) Regarding the TFG and ARS forces now deployed in Mogadishu, Okello said that command and control was not vertical, but was "confused." He said while the various individual units had commanders, who those commanders reported to was often unclear. When queried whether the current command and control situation within Mogadishu could absorb the approximately 580 trained Somali troops now waiting in Uganda to return to Somalia, Okello replied "no," but said AMISOM could take the troops and mentor them until the TFG was ready to receive them.

Okello: AMISOM's Mandate is Sufficient

¶10. (C) AMISOM's current mandate was sufficient, Okello noted, adding that the mandate and rules of engagement allowed him to protect his forces and strike at any imminent threat. He noted that in some respects AMISOM was operating under more of a Chapter VII mandate, but doing it quietly to avoid controversy. He said there was no point in giving AMISOM a more expansive mission that his force would never have the capacity to fulfill. At present AMISOM was primarily occupied with protecting its bases and supply lines to the port and airfield, he added.

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¶11. (C) Okello thought that a force strength of 6,000 troops for AMISOM was probably enough. He emphasized that more support for the TFG security forces was desperately needed so that the TFG could establish its control over Mogadishu. He asserted that more support for the TFG security forces was a higher priority than "more AMISOM." Okello stated that AMISOM could "contain" an assault on the TFG in Mogadishu as long as AMISOM's supply lines were not cut. At the same time, the TFG forces should be "between" AMISOM and the insurgents. Currently, Okello said, in most cases TFG police were deployed adjacent to AMISOM forces, although the Burundian troops were more exposed. Regarding his own future, Okello, who has already served in Somalia for more than a year, expected he would be replaced by another Ugandan general in three to five months.

¶12. (C) Nevertheless, Okello made a plea for better equipment, particularly armored vehicles, secure communications, and real-time intelligence of impending threats against his forces. He said he was deeply concerned about the increasing level of sophistication in insurgent attacks, as well as the presence of foreign fighters. (Note: In the March 23 closed morning session at the AU, Okello told the assembly that the situation had turned critical, the foreign fighter pipeline was increasing, the fighters were obtaining better arms, and that the situation was "beyond concern" and had become "dangerous." End Note.)

Comment

¶13. (C) Gandhi comes from the Somali Diaspora and was most

recently a lecturer in Paris with no apparent military background. Although he is intelligent and thoughtful, he lacks a fundamental understanding of defense and military related issues, and our discussions with him suggest he is not receiving information regarding the status and disposition of what are, at least on paper, forces under his authority. General Okello, on the other hand, has a good grasp of the situation and is a strategic thinker determined to make a difference in Somalia, but frustrated by the many obstacles to progress.

¶14. (C) Comment continued. Although the JSC appears to be slow in getting started and much work remains to be done to stand up the JSF, in our view, U.S. support for the force will be critical if it is to get off the ground, and give Sharif's government a chance to succeed. End Comment.
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